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## FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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February 18, 1959  
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SUBJECT: Motivations for French Position on Negotiations with Soviets concerning German Reunification and European Security

In the course of discussions between the western allies during recent weeks concerning the German problem, it has become evident that French representatives are reflecting a very "tough" line on German matters, on some points voicing views which display a more conservative approach to new ideas for embellishing the traditional western position on Germany than that evidenced by the Federal Republic. While the motivations which underlie this French attitude are probably multifold and undoubtedly difficult to categorize in order of priority, the Embassy suggests that the following considerations may have a bearing on the French viewpoint:

1. Fear of U.S. withdrawal from Europe. Most French officials dealing with foreign affairs appear genuinely convinced that the continued presence of U.S. troops on the European continent is essential for the preservation of European security. These officials are apprehensive that any moves tending toward the recognition of the East German regime will provoke a chain reaction involving, in succession, links between East and West Germany on the basis of parity, some kind of "confederation", the separation of West Germany from NATO, the withdrawal of NATO troops from Germany and therefore (it is assumed) from Europe. In the event of U.S. withdrawal from Europe following the neutralization of Germany, the French are concerned that it would be difficult for other Western European countries to resist Soviet pressures toward a relaxation of defenses and the acceptance of a status of virtual neutrality. Thus, it is feared that a disintegration of Western defenses would occur while the Soviet bloc, regardless of whether the Warsaw Pact continued in force or not, would continue to form a relatively monolithic, aggressive unit.

2. Skepticism about effectiveness of West German "magnetism". Although French officials acknowledge that West Germany is much more powerful and attractive than East Germany, they question how much magnetism, over and above that already being exercised, can be brought to bear by the West German regime through organized contacts on an increased scale with East German authorities. The French seem to feel that the controls of the East German police state are such that an effort by the West to enlarge contacts can be turned to the advantage of the East German drive for recognition, without at the same time giving much impetus to furthering the West's objectives.

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3. Pessimism concerning Soviet disposition to make concessions. French officials are thoroughly pessimistic about the possibility that the USSR may be willing to make concessions far-reaching enough to permit the reunification of Germany on a basis acceptable to the West. They believe the Soviets are determined to hold on to East Germany and that the Kremlin will accept no changes in the status quo unless they are clearly favorable to the expansion of Soviet influence. Moreover, some French officials feel that the West has already gone too far in the direction of making concessions to the USSR. In this connection, they cite the decision to break up the disarmament package, the dropping of the link between an agreement on suspension of nuclear tests and progress in disarmament, and the apparent disposition of the U.S. to consider "other ways" than free elections to unify Germany. French Foreign Office representatives believe that these actions in themselves are quite sufficient demonstrations of reasonableness on our side, and that we should now insist on more "flexibility" from the USSR.

4. Lack of public pressures demanding new approaches. Government circles in France are not under great pressure from public opinion to make new approaches aimed at achieving a settlement with the USSR. Voices from the Left continue to advocate more "flexibility", but the Left is disunited and politically ineffectual. The predominant trend in French political life is a conservative one, hostile to the Soviet Union and suspicious of efforts at accommodation with the Soviets.

5. Doubts about desirability of German reunification. Most French officials at the working level give lip-service to the objective of reunifying Germany, but it is apparent that many have doubts as to whether this would really be beneficial to long-term French interests. It is true that French relations with West Germany are good, and, in general, French industrialists display a degree of confidence in contemplating competition with West Germany within the Common Market which would have been surprising a few years ago. Nevertheless, the prospect of a reunified Germany is something else again, and the economic, as well as military, problems which this would raise are matters which many French would just as soon dodge. For them, the status quo is reasonably satisfactory and the prospect of changing it arouses no great enthusiasm.

At least one ranking Foreign Office official has spoken along these lines to the Embassy. More importantly, General de Gaulle has taken a similar stand. It may be recalled that, in his conversation with the Secretary on February 6, 1959, de Gaulle acknowledged that he had not been a strong advocate of German reunification in 1947 and that this was the case today. He said this was, first, because of the situation in France and, second, because of the fear which would be created among all people, not only governments (including the peoples of Eastern Europe) by a reunified Germany.

While the public as a whole in France is not emotional on the subject, probably because German reunification appears to be so remote a possibility, it seems obvious that, if warmer relations with West Germany are accepted and even welcomed, the idea of a reunified Germany would be viewed askance. This attitude naturally reinforces the lukewarm view of French officials on the prospect of German reunification.

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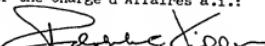
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It is true that, in at least one respect, French officials have been somewhat inconsistent with the attitudes described above, inasmuch as they have put forward on a tentative basis in allied consultations the concept of a reunified Germany which would have a "special status" with regard to NATO (i.e., guaranteed by NATO but not sharing the obligations of NATO). In discussing this plan, French representatives have likened the status of Germany thereunder to that of Finland vis-a-vis the USSR. They recognize that it would entail the departure of U.S. troops from Germany; however, the French seem to feel that the risks of the Soviets accepting such a plan would be minimal, whereas the gains to be achieved by the West on the public opinion side by demonstrating "flexibility" in presenting a plan of this nature would be considerable. Even if the plan were accepted, the French argue, it would be possible to link it up with important concessions by the Soviets in withdrawing their forces from Central Europe.

The Embassy is inclined to view this French suggestion of a "special status" for Germany as a working-level project which has not been thoroughly thought out and which is conceived primarily as an exercise in public presentation, without any chance of Soviet acquiescence. On balance, the Embassy believes that the French are reasonably satisfied with the status quo, and suspicious of any actions which might start a trend resulting in U.S. "disengagement". It is therefore to be expected that France will continue to play a conservative role in preparations for negotiations on the German problem.

For the Chargé d'Affaires a.i.:



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